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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, December 27, 1934

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Holiday Fires." Information from the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The midwinter holidays are times for fires as well as festivities. That's a suggestion that comes from Dr. David Price who is the fire prevention expert of the Department of Agriculture. I've told you about Dr. Price before when we've discussed home fire fighting. So you no doubt remember that his job is to find out all he can about fire prevention and fire fighting and pass the information along to you and me and everyone else who can help in this important matter. Dr. Price tells me that many of our most disastrous home fires happen each year in the midwinter holidays. So today I thought we might take time out in the midst of talking about holiday food and games and parties and check up on holiday safety. You see, even a very small fire can spoil the fun.

If you live on a farm, Dr. Price advises you to own a good ladder for fire-prevention purposes. In fact, he believes that our rural fire loss would be much smaller if every farm had a ladder. You see, quick work is necessary for successful fire fighting and a convenient ladder makes any roof fire quickly accessible. That ladder will also allow you to inspect your chimneys and flues often and thus prevent those fires that come from unsafe chimneys and dirty flues especially at this time of year when all the fires in the house are going.

Says Dr. Price: "A farm fireman's best friend is his ladder."

Well, beside the ladder he mentions are other easy ways to protect your home. One way is to take the greatest care in handling gasoline and kerosene. These may be quick means of starting the fire in the fireplace or in the kitchen range but they're also quick about setting you or your house on fire.

Inflammable Yuletide decorations have been responsible for some of the worst holiday fires. Fortunately, we have fewer of those old-time Christmas trees lighted with candles that we used to see. But even the electric lights, now used on Christmas trees, need checking over each year to be sure the wiring and the lights are in good condition. Loose wires or poor connections may cause a short circuit. And one stray spark in the midst of a dry fir tree laden with paper and celluloid and cotton-wool snow --- well, you see what a perfect setting for a fire that is.

The tree isn't the only decoration that may be a fire hazard. Ropes of evergreen or any dry greens hanging too near candles or gas fixtures or the open fireplace may ignite quickly if a spark catches in them. And ropes of red or green tissue paper or other inflammable ornaments also need to be placed carefully out of danger's way. Flickering candles, attractive as they are around a room, are always a fire hazard -- particularly with youngsters about.

You know, an old English superstition is that witches or evil spirits will take possession of your home if all Christmas greens aren't out by Twelfth Night. I think that's a very practical superstition. By twelve days after Christmas the greens in the house will be very dry and ready tinder for any spark.

Any kind of inflammable rubbish whether it's dry greens, or the papers and boxes that held gifts, or excelsior or other packing material -- any kind of rubbish that will burn is a fire hazard in the house. Never leave rubbish in a heap in the cellar -- or in the attic or the garage, for that matter.

Be careful, too, to dispose of hot ashes in a safe place. Never put them in a wooden barrel or box in the cellar. Be careful about using open fires and matches. Take time every now and then to look over your stove, your furnace, your fireplace and flue to be sure all is in good condition. And give your electric wiring and appliances a safety inspection every now and then, too.

Beside such precautions, you can own a handy metal container full of some chemical that will put out fire. Some of these fire extinguishers contain soda-acid; others contain calcium chloride; still others are carbon tetrachloride -- the same material that we use for cleaning clothes and taking out grease spots. Of course, it goes without saying that adequate water-storage facilities in homes, especially in rural homes, is important for safety.

But some of our worst fires come from gasoline or oil. And neither water nor soda-acid has much effect on such fires. The burning oil simply floats on the surface and continues to burn. In fact, water may actually spread a fire like this. The effective way to treat it is to smother it -- blot it out with sand or soil. Of course, you can smother a small oil fire -- one in a frying pan or broiler, just with a wet towel.

That reminds me. If you want a useful homemade fire extinguisher that costs nothing, fix up a large metal pail full of sand and put a handy shovel in it. Then you can apply a heavy blanket of sand quickly to smother any flame. Such an outfit is particularly useful for the garage.

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